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Sen. Hardiman to hold hearings on state's failure to protect children in foster-care homes

LANSING – Citing a newly released state audit that criticized the Michigan Department of Human Services for its failure to properly oversee its foster-care system, Senator Bill Hardiman announced he would hold a hearing when the Senate returns to determine if the failure requires legislative action or heightened oversight of the Department to carry out its mission.

Sen. Hardiman pledged a quick and thorough review of foster care safety in response to the Auditor General's recent report on numerous issues and concerns.

"Foster care children often come out of troubled and stressful situations. We must ensure that their placement in foster care does not expose them to dangerous or unhealthy settings," Senator Hardiman said. "For starters, the Families and Human Services Committee will take up background check bills when the Senate returns."

Auditor General Thomas McTavish issued a harshly critical report that revealed the Children's Foster Care Program had not conducted adequate criminal background checks on those working in the system between Oct. 1, 2000 and May 31, 2004. The report showed that the department had not monitored contractors to ensure they were delivering the services for which they were paid. The audit also showed that the department failed to provide required oversight visits to foster children. The audit found that more than 350 foster-care providers and adults with serious criminal convictions were living with foster children.

"Pure and simple, the findings of this audit are unacceptable," Senator Hardiman said. "I read that the department said the problems were 'technical' and simply a failure of 'documentation'. The purpose of the hearing will be to determine if this is a problem of departmental disorganization and sloppy management or a much more serious systemic problem."

"These children are among the most vulnerable in our society," Senator Hardiman said. "The Auditor General's report is very troubling. We have tried to improve foster care through an emphasis on permanent placements, more funding following years of underfunding, attention to foster children with special needs and a strong partnership with private agencies."

Senator Hardiman chairs the Senate Families and Human Services Committee and the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee overseeing the budget for the Department of Human Services. He has conducted committee hearings and investigations on past Auditor General reports regarding the Family Independence Agency and its internal audit, its Food Assistance Program, and its inspector general and complaint referral process.

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Editor's note: Comments from Sen. Hardiman may be downloaded from the Michigan Senate Republican Majority audiowire at:
<http://www.senate.michigan.gov/gop/audiowire/hardiman/index.htm>.